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## BETH CHAPMAN

### SECRETARY OF STATE

*Speech written and given by Secretary of State Beth Chapman  
October 25, 2007  
Pew Charitable Trust Headquarters, Washington, DC*

Thank you for the kind invitation to be a part of this ground-breaking moment of enhancing and improving upon our nation's great Democracy. In return, I would like to share with you a portion of a letter written to Congress.

*"About 2.5 million men and women in the Armed Forces are of voting age at the present time. Many of those in uniform are serving overseas or in parts of the country distant from their homes. They are unable to return to their States EITHER - - to register or vote. Yet these men and women, who are serving their country and in many cases risking their lives, deserve above all others to exercise the right to vote in this election year. At a time when these young people are defending our country and its free institutions, the least we can do is make sure that they are able to enjoy the rights they are being asked to fight to preserve"*

These words though eloquently written, expressing my thoughts and speaking to the very heart and soul of today's subject of military and overseas voting are not my words. Ironically, they are words spoken 55 years ago by President Harry S. Truman in a letter to Congress.

Today we gather, 5 ½ decades later with no resolve, no total solution and frankly - no acceptable excuses.

With computer technology at an all-time high and numerous trips to the moon and beyond – the problem of not allowing our military men and women EVERY possible opportunity to vote is inexcusable and a travesty of justice.

The full right of Democracy has ripped the veil of racial equality - has garnered support for both genders and has paved the way for those with disabilities - yet it has failed to meet the needs of members of our military – the very ones who fight for our freedom.

Those who fight for the preservation and protection of our right to vote abroad - should be allowed their right to vote at home.

America should no longer keep Democracy just within the confines of a voting booth - but it must go into the battlefields where the greatest among us are serving our country. If they cannot come to a voting booth, then we must simply take it to them.

The sacred freedom of the right to vote should go into every ocean, every cave and foxhole, every barrack and desert place whether at sea, in the jungles or in the air – or even on foreign mission fields for those American missionaries serving God, Democracy should be extended to those serving us abroad. Their absence from home should not remove their right to vote.

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*SECRETARY OF STATE*

The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Overseas Vote Foundation is ensuring that it will not, and we all owe a great dept of gratitude to them.

If Democracy was strong enough to cross the boundaries of race, gender and physical disabilities years ago – then it is strong enough to reach those who defend our right to vote today.

America is only as fair, honest and strong as our elections process – We must not simply do what is required, but all that is necessary to honor the men and women who wear the uniform of the United States Military and all of our citizens overseas.

With the help of the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Overseas Vote Foundation, it is my full intention that no one ever stand where I stand today 55 years from now and quote from this speech as I have done from someone else's. To allow that to happen would not only serve as disrespect for our military and overseas voters, but it also would serve as a shameful slap in the face of Democracy.

Thank you to the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Overseas Vote Foundation for having the courage and the vision to take this first step to make this obvious need a reality.

On behalf of the 91,854 Alabamians overseas, including the Alabama National Guard who ranks #1 per capita in the nation of deployed troops since 9/11 – thank you for seeing the potential in me and my staff and the great people of Alabama to become a flagship state in championing this common cause that we share.

It is our commitment to equally provide as much support for you and this project at home, as our military members provide for us abroad.